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Travels in
Africa - Stories and
Incidents

A Little Girl and The Lions

By

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A LITTLE GIRL And the Lions

(This true incident is related by Rev. E. H. Richards, D.D.)

SHE lives in Africa not far from Pakule, a lovely little paradise close to the spot where the Tropic of Capricorn dives into the Indian Ocean on the east coast. Her full name is Xidedevela Mtimasana (She-day-day-vay-lah M-tee-mah-sah-nah), which in English is Miss Watercress Littleblack.

She was about ten years old when this story begins, delightfully black, and as full of energy as a buzzing bumblebee.

A few miles from her home a native Christian convert named Augilazi (glass) and his wife, Mabumbi (ear of corn), had opened a station where they were teaching "everything that the white man knew" so far as they understood it; and that was clear into the Kingdom of Heaven in one direction.

The children on this station went out two by two — in real Bible fashion — calling on all the people within five miles of the meeting house and one day came to the *krall* where our small friend Xidedevela lived.

She was wide awake to all they had to tell and went home with them at once to see and hear more of what was doing. She saw that each of the station girls had a good denim gown, while she still wore only a suit of peanut oil and sunshine, but what impressed her most was the singing, reciting, praying and all the lively life of the mission school.

The music touched her so deeply that tears ran down her shining cheeks. The story of Daniel in the lions' den was just the thing for her, for she knew where the lions were, and still worse, they knew where she was! She was glad to learn that there was One who could make even the roaring lions behave themselves.

When she went home she told her mother that she was going to be a Christian and begin right away. But this announcement did not make the mother happy. If her little girl were a Christian she would never grind corn to make beer nor tend the still where strong drink was made; nor would she join the dance any more, nor be but the "one wife" of any man. And was it not the glory of woman to distil rum from plantains and whiskey from corn? Could she ever be *anything* if not chief dancer in the national game? And to be the first or only wife meant poverty for her whole family, where she would have all the

work to do, and her husband be known as "a man-of-less-than-grasshopper-size."

Now the mother of Xidedevela, whose name as nearly as we can recall it was Mrs. Ignora Muss, believed all these things and was desperately in earnest to save her child from the "medicine" of the missionary. This foreign witch-M. D. might be well enough for his own tribe and country but not for Africa.

Meanwhile the little girl returned to the mission, and finally ran away and *lived* there. This aroused her mother, who went after her, brought her home and whipped her enough to drive out any sort of new spirits, she thought.

But as soon as chance offered, away went the brave child to the mission again; and again the mother brought her home, — this time calling in the witch-doctor who whipped her well but in vain, as she would not consent to leave the station.

Then he tied her feet to the limb of a tree with her head hanging down, hoping that her religion might ooze out from her mouth, but hers was not the oozing-out sort.

Following this he gave her dreadful doses of his medicine calculated to destroy the "religious germs" but all in vain. Xidedevela lived, and by eating cornmeal mush seasoned with peanut gravy and thickened with pow-

dered caterpillar, etc., she gained strength to make a safe rush to the mission station again.

She did not report the dreadful treatment of the witch-doctor, nor her mother's unkindness, until some time after her final tribulation, which she must now endure. For her mother determined on one last terrible resort to save her child for heathendom.

She appeared again at the station and took the little daughter home with her. Toward evening she prepared some bark rope, took Xidedevela to the forest, where with her own hands she bound the little arms behind her and then tied her to a tamarind tree, hoping that lions would come and either frighten the religion out of her, or, if the worst must come, that they would eat her up. Was it not better so than to have her lost to everything in the home, the tribe and the nation?

No one knows what occurred in the dark, dismal forest that night, but one can believe that the little black martyr bound to a tree was not left alone.

In the early morning a small boy went out to pray, as is the usual custom on all the stations in these parts, and as he began his petition Xidedevela heard him, and knowing that it was the voice of a Christian at prayer, though she did not know who it was, she called to him. He heard her, came and untied the

bark rope which bound her and brought her to the station.

The teacher says that lion tracks were within fifteen feet of where the child was bound. They had lain down, sat down, stood and walked about till they had meditated their toothsome morsel from every point, with never a nearer scent than their fifteen feet of solid distance permitted.

Instead of scaring the religion out, the dark night had proved to be the greatest help to its rapid growth.

When questioned later as to her sensations within this den of lions, she remarked with all the confidence of a modern Daniel, " You taught that the Great Great made the lions and that He also made me; and He would never have let us eat each other up!"

Who can think calmly of enduring such an ordeal? Let the philosopher try to " explain " if he will, but we prefer to believe that the angel who " shut the lions' mouths " in old Babylon was very near to Xidedevela that night in the African forest.

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